



Charlotte Mason's House of Education,
Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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members would be prevented by east winds from working out of doors. I had hoped, however, that most—if not all—the members would be able to find a window in their own house or in a friend's, from which a tree would be visible; and I am greatly concerned to hear that one 'cannot find a tree within a mile' of her home. A country in which trees do not exist, or are hidden by fog, or are made inaccessible by storm and cold in April, is unfortunately situated for Fine Art. When Mr. Ruskin abused the developments of modern civilisation, the destruction of the 'country,' the smoke-fogs and 'storm-wind of the nineteenth century,' he had some reason for his bitterness, after all!"

To avoid this difficulty, in the following year the subject was varied thus:—"Students who cannot see a tree from a window, or find it too cold for out-of-doors sketching, can draw a bough such as may be picked up in any country walk, blown from a tree, or broken—with permission—from a hedge. The bough should be pretty well set with twigs, and not too much battered to look like a miniature tree when planted in the room in a flower pot or in a pile of books. If you happen to find a hazel, and like playing with your work as most people with imagination do, you might hang a couple of Christmas tree tinsel fruits on the leafless twigs and illustrate the rhyme, 'I had a little nut tree.' But in any case, spread a sheet or a white paper behind the bough, since you cannot possibly follow out the twigs if they come against the furniture, pictures and wall-patterns which crowd the ordinary dwelling-room." There is a way out of most difficulties, and this gave some pretty results.

With the portfolio I sent round some plates from *Modern Painters* to illustrate the subject; "The Aspen," to show how delicately and thoroughly such a leafless tree might be drawn; "Good and Bad Tree-drawing," with some necessary elucidation from the text; and "The Dryad's Toil" and "Young Ivy," to exemplify bough-drawing and springing curvature.

THE ENCOURAGEMENT OF ARTISTIC FEELING IN THE YOUNG.

BY CANON NORRIS.

THERE is much misleading talk in these days about "Art." We have "art" schools, and "art" lectures, and "art" classes, and "art" professors, and "art" students. We have even "art" fabrics and "art" colours,—and lowest degradation of all,—we have the "art style" in furniture, fenders and gas fittings. Now this is all wrong, and all very misleading. It is apt to give the impression—it certainly has given the impression—that art is a quality which can be taught or created, or even manufactured by machinery. The young man who has attended certain classes or gone through certain courses of instruction and obtained stated qualifications, believes himself on these grounds to be an artist. He begins to give lessons: he takes a room: he puts up a brass plate—"John Smith, Art Master,"—and henceforward is known as Mr. Smith, the Artist.

Now this would not matter so much if Mr. Smith did not give lessons, and otherwise spread it about amongst the young people and the aspiring parents of his neighbourhood, that "art" can be taught. A worse thing still happens—Mr. Smith means to get on; he has his eyes open to the trend of public life and municipal institutions.

To his artistic qualifications, he adds many certificates or proficiency in the elements of various sciences or of various industries. He can teach designing, weaving, dyeing or mining construction, machine drawing, etc., etc. And he applies for, and gets, a position as head master of the "School of Art" in a provincial town.

Here the matter becomes really serious, because this gives him considerable influence.

There is even a movement afoot at the present moment to put the "art" teaching in all our elementary schools under

the control of the principals or head teachers of the Schools of Art; this has already been done at some of the large towns in the Midlands.

Now here I do not wish to be misunderstood. If you have a true artist at the head of the School of Art, as we have in some of our larger towns, by all means let him have control over, or at least some say in, the handling of the whole subject throughout the town. But the point is,—that in existing circumstances Mr. Smith may, and does, become head of the so-called "School of Art" without having a particle of true art in his composition, and solely on the ground of having obtained certain qualifications which are within the reach of most intelligent young men who choose to work, whether they have any true art in them or not. I propose to come back to this difficult question of "Schools of Art" presently. Meanwhile let us keep clearly before us in all we do or say about the encouragement of artistic feeling in the young, that art is a sacred thing; it is a gift of God, and—"poeta nascitur non fit" is true. You can no more make a child an artist than you can make him a poet if God has not given him the gift. We recognise this quite clearly about poetry. We try to teach our children something of the purpose and the beauty of poetry—we teach them, or we ought to teach them, about the lives and work of the great poets. We make them learn portions of the great poems by heart, we may even teach them the mysteries of scansion or the rules of the sonnet; but we do not for a single moment allow either ourselves or them to suppose that all this will make them poets. So it should be with "art."

Keeping it quite clear then that we cannot teach art if it is not there; that we cannot, that is to say, create, or infuse into a child, the spirit of art if God has not put it there—we can come safely to the consideration of the question how best to "encourage" art in the young.

A little while ago an artist, in talking on the subject, said, "You cannot infuse the artistic spirit *into* a child, but you can infuse it *in* a child if you use the word 'infuse' in the sense in which it is used of tea! You can infuse the tea if it is in the teapot by pouring boiling water upon it, but there must be tea in the pot and the water must be boiling if the infusion is to be a success."

So,—you can infuse the artistic spirit (if it is there), and draw out all its rich and subtle qualities by surrounding it with the right environment. That is, I think, a fair analogy and one which may well be borne in mind.

I believe that there is in most children something of the artistic spirit, and it only needs the right surroundings and the right encouragement to draw it out and cultivate it. It has been said, indeed, that all children have it. But without going so far as this, there is no doubt that it is true of very many. Almost all children have an inclination to draw. Witness the margins of our old school books—the chalk marks on our gate-posts, walls, and pavements—the stick-drawings on the sands, mercifully to be obliterated by the coming tide. That is, almost all children have an inclination to produce with the hand what they see with the eye. Here you have an element, something to work upon. Train the eye to appreciate and look for the beautiful, and train the hand (medium matters little) to reproduce correctly what the eye has selected, and you have gone a long way towards the right kind of encouragement of the artistic spirit.

Our endeavour should therefore be to surround our children in every way we can from their earliest childhood with things that at any rate shall not vitiate by their vulgarity and ugliness. And this wants watching in the homes and schools of the well-to-do classes, more than in the homes and schools of the poor. To put it bluntly, there is generally more that is vulgar and ugly and misleading in the former than in the latter. To simplify matters there, take drawing specifically. Now in the teaching of drawing, what are we going to aim at, and how is it going to be done? The aim is undoubtedly the appreciation of the beautiful; but you may aim at appreciation with a view to expression (*i.e.* "to make an artist of him"), or you may aim at expression merely with a view to a better appreciation, and this latter is by far the safer aim; the other is quite sure to force itself out if it is to come.*

Our aim then being appreciation of the beautiful, and expression with a view to fuller appreciation, let us look at some of the difficulties and some of the opportunities with which we are surrounded in these days and in this country.

* Turner was a hairdresser's apprentice. De Wint was trained to the law, and numberless other instances could be quoted.

Perhaps we had better take the difficulties first, and amongst the difficulties, first and foremost must be placed the ordinary "school of art," as it exists commonly in the provincial towns in this country at the present time.

Owing to the exigencies of finance, "science and art" have been lumped together, and our "schools of art" depend to a very large extent upon the grants they earn for their existence. These grants are for all sorts of things, many, if not most, of which have nothing whatever to do with art—elementary sciences or technical subjects of all sorts and kinds. This means, as I have already suggested, that the successful teacher of a "school of art" would not have, and very often has not, any sort of artistic feeling at all, and the results are disastrous, because from the position he occupies he is obliged, even if he may have sufficient proper feeling to be unwilling, to pose as an artist. And however innocent or ignorant of the harm he is doing the teacher may be, false standards, wrong aims, and meretricious methods are disseminated amongst his pupils—pupils numbering, remember, in our larger towns, their hundreds every year. And so it comes to pass that artists are commonly known to advise parents by all means to avoid the "school of art," if the child shows any artistic feeling. So, too, it comes to pass, that at the annual prize-giving or exhibition of the students' work, you expect to find, and too often do find, nothing but a dreary series of copies of second-rate pictures, or plaques and fire-screens bedizened with the inevitable Iris.

One does not see what is to save "schools of art" until the fatal and wholly ill-matched union of "science and art" can be dissipated, and we can have men appointed to "schools of art" because they are artists, and not because they are successful teachers of all kinds of things that have nothing to do with art. This is not impossible; in Scotland it has already been effected; the Glasgow School of Art is a school of art pure and simple, and receives a block-grant from the Government, in the use of which it has a free hand. This is an immensely important point. First let us get rid of the connection with science, and secondly let us get rid of the grant-earning (payment by results) system, and then we might go forward. Until those two things are done, not only shall we not get much help out of our schools of art, but they

will be active difficulties in our way, because they spread a false idea of what art is and means. And here again, to avoid misunderstanding, be it acknowledged that they are most useful institutions apart from art; and what one complains of is not their existence, but their name. It is one of those matters in which a name makes all the difference. Call them Schools for Hand and Eye Training, or Technical Schools, or Schools of Elementary Science, or Commercial Schools, or what you will, but do not call them schools of art when true art hardly enters into their purview at all.

Another difficulty is machinery. The production of cheap furniture, cheap decoration, cheap mouldings, picture frames, bell handles, coal scuttles—all on a pattern—turned out by the million with no personality and no life, may have its advantages economically; but from an artistic point of view it is destructive, because it surrounds us, if not with positive vulgarity, at any rate with soulless and meaningless ornamentation. In this direction things are improving. Tottenham Court Road is a different thing from what it was five-and-twenty years ago. Guilds of handicraft (such as at Manchester and Birmingham), arts and crafts exhibitions, as well as great individual teachers like William Morris, have done and are doing great things for the elevation of public taste. It is not very difficult now, and one looks forward to the time when it will be positively easy to surround our young people with things of every kind, which shall further and not hinder their artistic training. In the towns we have another difficulty, less felt in the country districts, and that is the ugliness and dulness of our straight streets, endless rows of monotonous houses, iron-girdered bridges, and too often pretentiously vulgar public buildings. Now all these things must be counteracted if we are to teach our children to feel after beauty and encourage their faculty for expression. Therefore, turn now to our opportunities and to the possibilities within everyone's reach.

The subject as it affects elementary schools and the homes of the working classes is outside our present scope; it is rather for the better-to-do that this article is intended; what then can we do? First, we can surround our children with things that are good so far as they go, and not bad. Why should not our nursery and our schoolroom be hung with the

really beautiful reproductions of good pictures (*e.g.*, the Auto-type Company's), instead of with garish advertisements of Christmas numbers? Again, wall paper, paint, curtains; how often one hears it said: "Oh, it doesn't matter, it's only for the schoolroom!" Remember that the impressions of early youth *stick*, strong habits of mind are formed when we are very young. Many a man, as he chooses some frightful thing for his own house, says, in justification: "Well, I can't help it, I love that sort of thing, we had it on the stairs at home." Accustom a child to what is good and beautiful and true, and he will learn unconsciously to discard what is ugly and vulgar.

And to come to the more positive and direct aspect of the subject. Encourage a child to draw, and to draw correctly. One looks back and marvels at the "clean-paper" difficulty; how one used to grab at an unused half sheet, and one looked with nothing short of distant awe on a whole clean sheet of foolscap. Paper is cheap enough, let the children have it, and pencils. Don't let children go on scribbling from fancy or from memory, and doing things wrong. Who has not heard: "Oh, I know it's wrong, but I always do it like that; you see horses' feet are so difficult."

If a child shows any real aptitude for drawing, it is worth while to take great pains with him when he is young, and perhaps the most important thing of all is to insist on truth from the very beginning.

"What shall I draw?" is continually on the child's lips, and instead of telling him to draw a farmyard with some horses and cows in it, or a house and garden and some children playing in it, or any other impossible thing;—give him something simple and see that he does it right, a leaf, a twig from an apple tree, a kitchen chair, a wheelbarrow, a candlestick, anything that he can grasp and understand, and that will interest him. Don't let him copy from the flat except to teach him some particular things—*e.g.*, composition. It may be answered that Turner copied from the flat when he was a boy, and it is quite true he did, week after week assiduously, but it must be remembered that the drawings which he copied were carefully selected examples of men who were masters, that he copied them with a view to learning what he could of composition and line, and probably tore them up

directly afterwards because he worked in those days under a patron who knew what he was about and treated his copies as exercises.

It is of the utmost importance to remember that drawing is a means to an end and not an end in itself. When a man has learnt to see correctly and has sufficient mastery over his medium,—be it pencil or paint or what not,—to be able to put down correctly what he has seen or conceived, he has then the necessary equipment, the stock-in-trade so to speak of the artist; he has in fact as much as can be given him or can be taught him; the rest no man can teach or give him—he has either got it or he has not—that is to say, these things do not make him an artist, and this is the lesson that needs to be learnt by the present generation. The besetting sin of the age in this matter is the confusion of equipment with art. The walls of any modern exhibition will give an idea of the enormous number of persons who have the necessary equipment, but who lack the gift which alone could breathe life and power into their work. No,—"*poeta nascitur non fit.*" An artist is an inventor, a creator. No one can manufacture him, all you can do is to give the gift a chance if it is there.

We don't want all our children to be artists, while we do want them to feel after and appreciate what is beautiful, and let us frankly acknowledge that it is not everyone that can be taught even that much. At least then we can lose no opportunity of showing them really beautiful things, examples of great masters in painting, sculpture or craftsmanship (of which there are increasing numbers within reach)—at least we can teach them something of the beauty of nature and common things, something of the grandeur of simplicity and truth. And we can encourage them in drawing, modelling, needlework, carpentering, and a score of other things which will help them to use their eyes and hands accurately, both for their own pleasure and for the advantage of their generation.